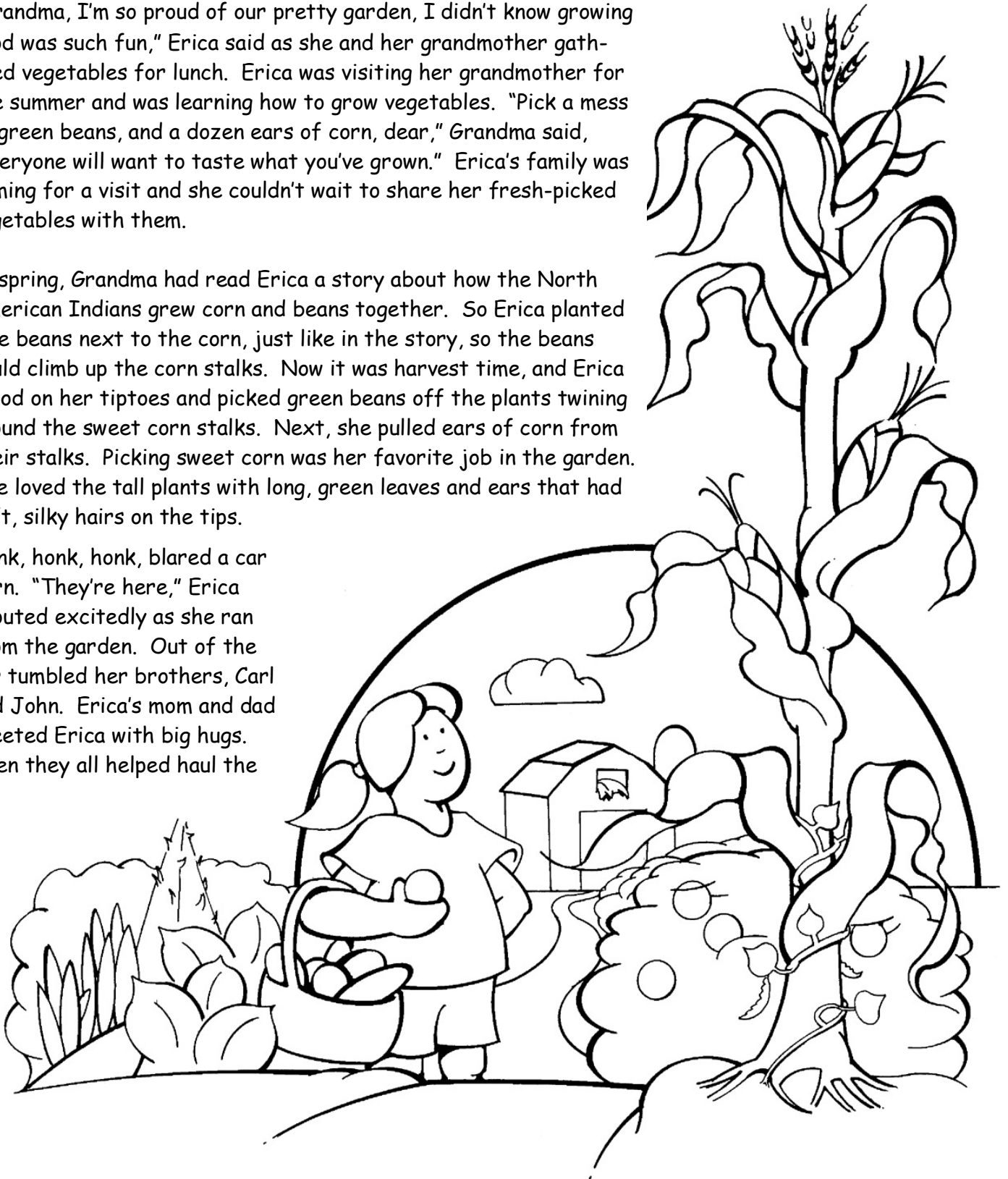


CORN STORY

"Grandma, I'm so proud of our pretty garden, I didn't know growing food was such fun," Erica said as she and her grandmother gathered vegetables for lunch. Erica was visiting her grandmother for the summer and was learning how to grow vegetables. "Pick a mess of green beans, and a dozen ears of corn, dear," Grandma said, "everyone will want to taste what you've grown." Erica's family was coming for a visit and she couldn't wait to share her fresh-picked vegetables with them.

In spring, Grandma had read Erica a story about how the North American Indians grew corn and beans together. So Erica planted pole beans next to the corn, just like in the story, so the beans could climb up the corn stalks. Now it was harvest time, and Erica stood on her tiptoes and picked green beans off the plants twining around the sweet corn stalks. Next, she pulled ears of corn from their stalks. Picking sweet corn was her favorite job in the garden. She loved the tall plants with long, green leaves and ears that had soft, silky hairs on the tips.

Honk, honk, honk, blared a car horn. "They're here," Erica shouted excitedly as she ran from the garden. Out of the car tumbled her brothers, Carl and John. Erica's mom and dad greeted Erica with big hugs. Then they all helped haul the



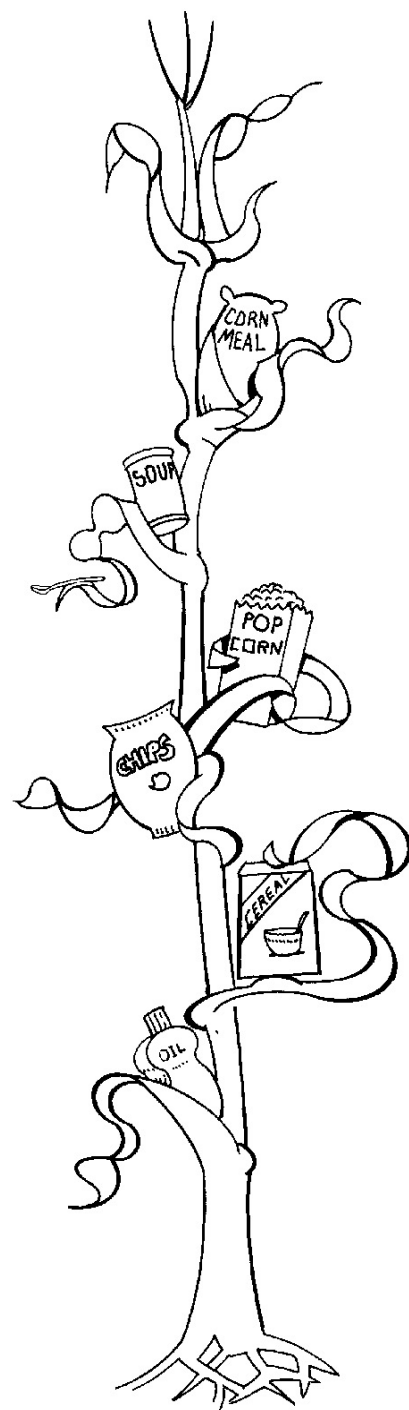
vegetable harvest into the house. Mom said, "You kids can explore the farm while we make lunch," and they were off in a flash. After showing her brothers the chickens, horses, and new calves, Erica took Carl and John to the garden. She taught them how to tell if a tomato was ripe by looking at the color and gently squeezing the fruit. They peered under the big leaves of the squash plants and found baby squash growing, so they picked some for lunch. John was surprised at the prickly squash leaves. Erica's brothers were especially impressed by the rows of sweet corn. They started to play hide and seek in the garden when they heard Grandma call, "Lunch time."

"My, the tomatoes and sweet corn are delicious," exclaimed Grandpa. "Erica grew those," said Grandma. Erica beamed at the thought of sharing food that she and Grandma had grown. "Hey, doesn't Uncle Bob grow corn?" asked John. "Yes, but he grows field corn," said Grandpa. "What's the difference?" Carl asked. Grandpa explained, "Well, they're different varieties and they're used in different ways. We eat



sweet corn fresh while the kernels are sweet and juicy. But Uncle Bob lets his field corn stay in the field until the kernels are hard and dry. He harvests the corn in fall and stores it until he is ready to sell it to use for animal feed or to feed us." "But I don't remember eating hard corn kernels and nothing as sweet and juicy as this corn," declared Carl as he continued eating.

"Besides corn on the cob and canned, how else do we eat corn?" Erica asked. "Well, corn syrup is used for a sweetener in lots of foods," said Grandma. "Let's go look in the pantry and see what we can find," John suggested, and the children raced off to the kitchen. "Here's some corn oil," said Carl as he spied a bottle on the shelf. Soon the three children were making a game of reading labels and they discovered corn in cereal, soups, cornmeal, and of course, corn chips and popcorn. Grandma pointed out that popcorn is another kind of corn. Erica remembered eating corn tortillas at her friend Maria's house. Grandma told them that tortillas are made from finely ground corn or wheat and are a daily food for people in other countries like Mexico.





"What's that?" asked John, pointing to a metal object with a handle. "That's a hand grinder," Grandma explained, "would anyone like to grind corn into cornmeal so we can bake cornbread?" "Yes!" the children shouted in unison. Grandma set up the grinder while they gathered around the table. She showed them how to pour the whole corn kernels into the top. "See how that sharp metal cone inside grinds the kernels into meal when I turn the handle?" Grandma asked. John and Erica took turns grinding the corn while Carl poured in the kernels. Everyone was excited to see the kernels become cornmeal.

"OK, now what?" asked Carl. "Well," said Grandmother, "here's my favorite cornbread recipe, let's figure out what we need and where we can get it." "We can get eggs from your chicken house," Erica said as she ran to get them. "Since we're making cornbread, can we use the corn oil that I found in the pantry?" asked Carl. John got buttermilk and butter from the refrigerator. "Hey Grandma, your neighbors made these," John noted as he read the labels. "OK, where can we get some wheat flour?" asked Carl. "We could grind some!" exclaimed John. He

had fun grinding the cornmeal and wanted to grind more. "I bought wheat flour that was ground by one of the local farmers," said Grandma, "let's use that."

Together everyone measured ingredients and mixed them. Soon the smell of fresh-baked cornbread filled the kitchen. No one could wait for supper to try the cornbread, so they each had a slice warm from the oven. Erica popped a piece into her mouth. "Yum!" she said.

Basic Buttermilk Cornbread

1 cup cornmeal
1 1/2 cups organic unbleached flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup packed light brown sugar

2 eggs (lightly beaten)
1 1/3 cups buttermilk
1/3 cup oil or melted butter
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Spray, oil, or butter muffin tins. Mix the dry ingredients in one bowl and the wets in a second bowl, then combine them with a few swift strokes. Using a rubber spatula, stir the batter up from the bottom of the bowl to make sure that there aren't any pockets of flour. Don't beat the batter and don't worry about a slightly uneven appearance. Spoon or scoop the batter into the tins, going nearly to the top for a nicely rounded muffin. Bake in the upper third of the oven until browned and well risen, about 25 minutes. Turn out the muffins and serve.

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